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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for the higher education curriculum are presented, with attention directed to prerequisite courses, general education, educational objectives, criteria for selecting staff to monitor required courses, and professional education. Two specific concerns are the need to provide specific and well-written course descriptions in the general catalog, and to substantiate whether a course requiring a prerequisite is actually sequential. General education, which provides essential subject matter, precedes the selection of specialized courses within a degree program. Each college/university needs to have clearly written statements pertaining to general education. From the philosophy on general education, specific objectives for students need to be developed cooperatively by faculty members and administrators. Ten criteria are proposed for selecting academic deans and faculty members who will serve on a general education council for the purpose of monitoring required courses. Six criteria for professional education courses are specified, and three descriptions of general education are also presented. (SW)

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CRITERIA IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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CRITERIA IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

There are selected criteria which administrators need to follow in providing for a generalized framework in higher education. One criteria, among others, pertains to the listing of courses and their numbers in the general catalog. The course titles need to be specific and, as much as possible, therein indicate what a course will deal with in terms of subject matter, skills, or attitudes. Sometimes, it is difficult to ascertain the content of a class by viewing the title. This is not the way it should be. Further, a course description in a catalogue should be clearly written. With the brief allotment of space in a course description, involved words should be carefully selected. The description should tell the student what will be taught and what will be learned in a course. Vague, meaningless wording needs to be omitted. The description should be direct in terms of indicating course content. Course titles and description need to be reviewed periodically to clarify and update subject matter to be stressed. Careful editing of course descriptions is essential.

Additional criteria will be discussed in the balance of this paper.

Prerequisites in the Curriculum

Numerous listed courses in a college/university catalog contain one or more prerequisite class offerings. Faculty members and higher education administrators need to be certain that the prerequisites are truly necessary so that students may succeed in the listed course title. Does a course sequentially build upon that presented in the prerequisites? If not, the prerequisite(s) should definitely be eliminated. Difficulties in enrolling in a class accrue for any student, when one or more prequisites are listed. Many times the listed prerequisites could be taken concurrently with the initially desired course. Those courses listed as being prerequisites should truly serve in that capacity-they possess needed subject matter in order for students to achieve success in the

in the next sequential class.

General education courses versus specialization in the curriculum has always presented problems in higher education. General education for all students (essential subject matter) precedes the selection of courses reflecting specialized areas within a major degree being pursued. Thus, specialized courses taken within a major should build upon classes taken in general education. Gordon F. Vars wrote:

> Mankind over the centuries has struggled to reconcile two seemingly contradictory tendencies--specialization and integration. Specialization--focusing energy and resources on narrow and specific problems--is commonly credited with many of the major breadthroughs in science and technology. Yet, at the same time equally great minds, often in the humanities and the arts, have sought "grand designs," the broad concepts and principles that weld disparate elements into some meaningful pattern or whole.
>
> Curriculum designers at all levels are charged with the task of providing both--common, integrating, "general" education and also specialized education geared to individual interests and needs. It is usually assumed that elementary school will concentrate primarily on the basic skills and common fundamentals. Specialized education receives increased attention through the middle and high school years, ordinarily through provision of more and more elective choices. At the college level, the pattern is repeated, with the early years devoted mainly to the so-called liberal arts or general requirements. The time devoted to the major or field of specialization increases in later years and in graduate school.

Each college/university needs to have clearly written statement pertaining to general education. Courses required in the general education curriculum need to reflect the philosophy involved in general education. The Northeast Nissouri State University General Bulletin[2] contains the following abstract on general education:

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[1]Gordon F. Vars, "Designs for General Education", The Journal of Higher Education, March/April, 1982, page 216.

[2]Northeast Missouri State University General Bulletin, Kirksville, Missouri 63501, page 51.

> NMSU recognized the needs for two types of education-general education and specialized or professional education. General education studies expose students to their rich cultural heritage, and aid them in the interpretation of their present time and environment. Specialized or professional education studies deal with specific academic fields and areas of professional knowledge. Both types are necessary to prepare students for assuming responsibilities in a democratic society.
>
> General education stresses the uniqueness of man and the interrelationships in all of man's knowledge. Students who desire to become specialists need to be provided with this broad general educational perspective against which to view their own specific studies. No area of study operates in a cultural vacuum. In their college careers, students in all fields should seek a comprehensive view of the modern world. The required General Education pattern is designed to expand a student's perception, attitudes, and abilities in communication skills, social science, the sciences, and humanities.

From the philosophy or abstract on general education, specific objectives for students to attain need to be developed cooperatively by faculty members and administrators in the area of general education. The objectives should be written in language which is meaningful to students, faculty members, and administrators. The ends are possible for students to attain. They are comprehensive in scope. Thus, the scope of the stated objectives cover course requirements in general education. The objectives need to be adequately precise so that instructors might evaluate if students have achieved the desired ends. The following is a definition of general education, including necessary course components in that area of undergraduate class work[3]:

> General education provides students with facility in the use of the English language and a broad intellectual experience in the major fields of knowledge. It ensures that each graduate will have experienced some of the content, method, and system of values of the various disciplines which enable man to understand himself and his environment, as dealt with at a level of abstraction beyond that usually found in secondary school studies.
>
> A minimum of six credit hours will be required in each of the following fields: English Composition and Oral Communication;

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[3]Fort Hays State University General Catalog, Fort Hays, Kansas. 1981-1983 catalog.

Social or Behavioralsciences; Natural Sciences, including mathematics; and Arts and Humanities with a minimum cumulative general education transfer requirement of 30 hours.

A quality general education curriculum provides needed subject matter for preprofessionals to utilize in student teaching and later on as licensed, certified teachers. College/university supervisors of student teachers need to evaluate if adequate use of general education is made in teaching-learning situations. Do weaknesses exist in the general education program in that student teachers lack adequate subject matter background? Opportunities might then be in evidence to modify and revise component parts in general education.

A general education council composed of academic deans and faculty members representing the diverse organized bodies of knowledge need to monitor the required courses in the curriculum. Do the required courses truly reflect viable definitions pertaining to general education? Students need to achieve breadth and depth of understandings, skills, and attitudes in the general education curriculum.

Criteria for selecting general education council members might well include the following:

1. each member needs to be highly knowledgable in desiring to achieve quality and excellence in the curriculum.
2. members individually must be willing to give of their time and talents to study, analyze, and make relevant recommendations to improve offerings in general education.
3. cooperation and respect among committee members in essential.
4. interactions within meetings must follow approved parliamentary procedure methodology.
5. creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving need to be encouraged.
6. careful records of each meeting need to be written. The minutes

need to be approved by involved connittee members.

7. input from interested faculty members should be invited by general education committee members. Meeting dates need to be posted ahead of time in order that responsible visitors may attend desired meetings of the general education council.
8. an agenda needs to be in the hands of general education council members prior to the conducting of any given meeting. Adequate time needs to be available to each committee member to reflect upon and research needed information based on agenda items.
9. effective leadership in any meeting needs to be provided for general education committee members. Quality leadership must stimulate efforts in developing the best general education curriculum possible.
10. interaction among committee members in general education committee meetings needs analyzing. Modifications should be made by each member to improve the quality of discussions and deliberations.

Professional Education in the Curriculum

Courses leading to a college/university degree need to build upon classes offered in general education. Professional education indicates specialization. Breadth and depth learning within the framework of specialized course work is still significant. Each student truly must become a professional in securing a degree.

Professional education courses need to follow selected criteria. These include:

1. each course offered truly reflects needed understandings (facts, concepts, and generalizations), skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, and communication abilities), and attitudes (quality values, beliefs, and feelings toward the degree being pursued).
2. sequential classes need to be in the offing. Thus, increasingly

complex understandings, skills, and attitudes need to be acquired by learners. Course work should be required as being sequential if and only if the prerequisites are truly needed.

3. professors who have demonstrated proficiency in specialized subject matter and teaching skills should teach professional courses leading to the separate majors in degree requirements.
4. objectives for each course in professional education need to express clarity of content for students to achieve. Instructors/professors need to guide students to achieve the desired ends.
5. evaluation of student progress needs to reflect the objectives in each course in professional education. Evaluative techniques utilized must be valid and reliable. A comprehensive program of evaluation needs to be in evidence. Thus, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learnings need to be appraised. A variety of appraisal procedures need to be utilized. These include teacher written tests, student projects, professor observation of student behavior, rating scales, checklists, anecdotal statements, standardized tests, and other means to evaluate total student achievement.
6. a variety of learning activities need to be emphasized in each course. The use of a single or multiple series textbook, films, filmstrips, slides, demonstrations, realia, excursions, participation in realistic situations, simulations, cassettes, and resource personnel, among others might be utilized as experiences for students to achieve objectives.

W. Allen Wallis[4] wrote:

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[4]W. Allen Wallis "Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in University Organization" in The Contemporary University: U.S.A. (Robert S. Morison, editor). Boston: Houghton Miff. in Company, 1966, page 49.

> ... At the heart of the contemporary university is the traditional university, characterized by an extreme degree of individualism and decentralization, seeking knowledge for knowledge sake, and seeking it in lieu of material goods and services rather than as a means of attaining them-indeed seeking knowledge not even for its own sake so much as for the sake of the search. Superimposed on this traditional university are many socially-important functions which have burgeoned recently and could not have been provided for satisfactorily had not universities assumed responsibility for them. Organizational arrangements required to meet these responsibilities involve more concentration of authority within the university, and more delegation of authority to outsiders, than is compatible with the central, unique, and enduring purposes of a university. Other institutions now exist which are capable of handling most, perhaps, all of these responsibilities. That an activity is worth doing and involves scientists and science, or scholars and scholarship, is not sufficient grounds for pursuing it in a university. It is not sufficient ground for concluding that the activity is not a menace to the university which accommodates it. Universities should, therefore, retain such responsibilities, or accept new ones, only if they are compatible with the decentralized decision-making that is essential to the basic purposes of universities, or if they contribute substanially to activities that are essential to these basic purposes.

The writer has presented guidelines in the higher education curriculum. The guidelines are general in nature. To be implemented, each guideline needs to be operationalized for utilization by faculty members and administrators in higher education. The movement then is from the philosophical to the practical.

Each college/university continually needs to study diverse philosophies, objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures in curriculum development. Ultimately, choices need to be made pertaining to that which guides students to achieve optimally in each course in the higher education curriculum.

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Fort Hays State University General Catalog, Fort Hays, Kansas. 1981-1983 catalog.

Gordon F. Vars, "Designs for General Education," The Journal of Higher Education, March/April, 1982, page 216.

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